

# BOSTON BLACKIE'S MARY

BY JACK BOYLE.

Story of Crook and Officer  
Who Faced Each Other With  
Courage in Scenes That Thrill

The great jute mill of the San Gregorio penitentiary was in full operation.

To the eye everything in the mill was as usual, and yet the guards were restless and uneasy.

Boston Blackie, university graduate, student, safe-blower and international crook, looked up and glanced around the mill. Covert eyes from a hundred looms were watching him with eager expectancy.

Boston Blackie leaped to the top of his loom, and flung up both arms.

The signal of revolt. The looms stopped; their deafening noise ceased as if by magic. In three minutes the convicts were in complete control of the mill, barred in from outside assault by steel doors and brick walls.

Calmly, with arms folded, Boston Blackie still stood on his loom watching the quick, complete fruition of his plans.

At all the officers in San Gregorio prison, Capt. Denison, head of the mill guards was hated most.

When he was dragged into the circle of captive guards, Capt. Denison fell on his knees and begged piteously for his life.

Denison might have saved him, cowardice doomed him. A convict with a wooden bludgeon in his hand leaped to his side and seized him by the throat.

"We've got you now, curse you," cried the volunteer executioner, "Turkey Burch. 'Pray you do, pray! Do you remember the night you sent me to the strait-jacket to please one of you rotten scoundrels? In just sixty seconds," he snarled, "this club is going to put you where you've put many a one of us."

A roar of approval came from the stripe-clad mob. Burch raised his club, swinging it about his head.

"Stop."

"Boston Blackie snatched the club from Burch's hand and flung it on the floor."

"I said no blood, and that goes as it lays, Turkey," he said quietly.

Burch caught up his club again. Boston Blackie seized an iron bar from a man beside him.

"All right," he said "Croak him whenever you're ready, Turkey, but when you kill him, I kill you. It's your move."

The two convicts faced each other. Thirty tense seconds passed.

"Why don't you do something?" Blackie said to Burch with a smile.

Then he threw his iron bar to the floor. "Pussy," he continued, turning to the crowd, "if you want to hear, hear. If you want to pay for that coward's blood with your own, Denison dies. But if he does, I quit you here and now. If you say so, he goes unharmed and we'll finish his business as we began it—right."

He turned to Burch, standing irresolute with his club.

"You're the first to vote, Turkey. What's the verdict?" he asked.

Burch hesitated, then tossed aside his club.

"You've run this business so far, Blackie," he said slowly, "and I guess it's up to us to let you finish it in your own way."

There was a chorus of approval from the convict mob.

"Fine!" said Blackie. "I knew you boys had sense. The first thing is to foot our dear Captain out those doors, and I nominate Turkey Burch to do it."

Denison was dragged to the doors. They were unbarred, and propelled by Turkey Burch's square-toed brogan shoe, Denison shot through into the yard, where he was under the protection of the guards on the wall. The other captives were treated similarly.

"Take this message to Deputy Warden Sherwood," said Blackie as the last of the bound bluecoats stood ready to be kicked out. "Tell him that unless within one hour he releases from Punishment Hall the ten men he sent here yesterday for protesting against the rotten food, we're going to tear down his five-million-dollar mill. Now go."

The man shot out. The doors were banged shut and barred behind him, while the mill resounded with the joyous shouts and songs of the convicts.

DEPUTY WARDEN MARTIN SHERWOOD, disciplinarian and real head of the prison management, took grim, silent delight in inflicting punishment.

There was a reason for this strange twist in the character of a man absolutely fearless and otherwise fair.

Years before he had brought a bride to his home just outside the prison walls. She was pretty and young and weak—just the sort of girl the attraction of opposites would send to a man like Martin Sherwood. There were a few months of happiness.

Then came the crash. A convict employed as a servant in the deputy's home completed his sentence and was released. With him went the deputy's wife. From that day Sherwood was a man unfeeling as iron.

Martin Sherwood sat calmly smoking when Capt. Denison rushed in and tumbled into a chair.

"They might as well have killed you in the mill as to send you up here to die of fright in my office," the deputy said with biting sarcasm.

"Deputy," Denison warned, "those convicts have a leader that looks like a regiment of soldiers. He is—"

"Boston Blackie, of course," interrupted Sherwood. "I should have known better than to put him where he could come in contact with the men."

The guard who had been given the convict leader's ultimatum rushed in.

"He says he wants the men out of Punishment Hall and your promise of better food from now on or he'll tear the mill down in an hour," the man reported.

The deputy warden turned to the men in the office.

"I'm going down to the mill," he said. "Have a machine gun ready in each of the four towers that cover this yard—ready but out of sight."

"Down to the mill?" cried Denison in amazement. "Deputy, you won't live five minutes. Don't go."

Sherwood took his knife and a roll of bills from his pocket and locked them in his desk. "If I am not back in half an hour, Denison, call the warden at his club in San Francisco; tell him to call on the governor for a regiment of militia. But for the next half hour do nothing except get your nerve back—if you can."

Sherwood pulled a straw from a whisker on his desk, stuck it between his teeth and started for the mill yard as calmly as though he were going to luncheon.

White-faced guards tried to stay him. The uproar from within the mill was deafening.

"Open the gates," commanded Sherwood. "Look them behind me and don't reopen them again even if you think it's to save my life."

The deputy crossed the yard, neither hurrying nor hesitating, and hammered on the door with his fist.

The clamor inside suddenly died.

"Open the door, boys," he commanded. "I'm coming in to talk to you. I'm alone and unarmed."

The man on guard unbarred the door, and Martin Sherwood stepped quickly in and faced the mob.

For five seconds that seemed an hour there was dead silence. It was broken by an inarticulate, unhuman, menacing roar of rage that rose to a scream.

A man rushed at the deputy and spat in his face. Calmly Sherwood drew out his handkerchief and wiped his cheek, but never for an instant did his eyes waver from the inflamed ones of the man he faced.

"I'll remember that, Kelly, when I get you in the jacket," he said slowly. The convict laughed, but pressed backward, cowed by the fearless assurance of his antagonist.

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BOSTON BLACKIE forced his way through the crowd. He was within ten feet of the deputy warden before he saw him. He caught the deputy by the shoulder and turned him toward the door.

"Go," he said. "Get out before they kill you."

Sherwood threw off his hand.

You may be able to command this convict rabble, Blackie," he said in a voice perfectly audible in the silence which had fallen on the mob, "but you can't command me. I came to talk to these men, and I'm going to do it."

From the rear came a metal weight which missed Sherwood's head by inches. The screaming blood cry rose again. One struck at the deputy's head with a shuttle, but Blackie hit first and laid the man senseless at his feet. Then he jumped to the top of a loom.

"Men, if you want to hang," he cried, his voice rising above the bedlam, "I'll go along with you. If you'll listen to me first."

As the men died down and Blackie talked to them.

All through the harangue Sherwood stood listening, his face inexpressive.

"Deputy," said Blackie, turning to him, "I have been to you said you would keep the men in Punishment Hall in the strait-jacket until they die, if necessary, to find out who smuggled out the letter complaining about the rotten food. Is that true?"

"We make three demands, then," said Blackie. "First, the release of all the men undergoing punishment; second, your promise that no man confined in this revolt shall be punished; third, your promise that henceforth we get the food for which the state pays but which the commissary captain steals."

"And if I refuse, what then?" asked Sherwood.

"At ten we will destroy the mill," "Boys," said the deputy, "I have listened to your spokesman. You know I can't grant your demands without consulting the warden, who is in San Francisco. I will do this, however. I will declare a half holiday. Come over to the upper yard, have your dinner as usual and we'll all watch a ball game in the afternoon. Before night I will give you your answer."

With the thought of the machine gun and what it covered the upper yard in his mind, Sherwood smiled grimly.

"Wait," cried Blackie. "When the men in Punishment Hall are free and you, Mr. Sherwood, have never heard of a man who has told us we'll be fed right and no one harmed or punished for this morning's work, we'll go into the upper yard—not before."

"Boys," said the deputy, "do as I suggest. We should you let this man," indicating Blackie, "order you around. Come on up to the yard, and I'll issue an extra ration of tobacco all around. Are you going to go along with me or stay here with him?"

"Well, stay," answered Blackie for the men.

A shout from the men proved Sherwood's defeat.

"You're quite a general, Blackie," said the deputy. "I'll give you an answer in fifteen minutes. But—"

He looked straight into Boston Blackie's eyes for an hour without crying out, but only a few.

Boston Blackie had been in the jacket for an hour and five minutes, and Martin Sherwood had waited in vain for plans for release.

The prison physician stood nearby, looking on anxiously. One man had died after the jacket had been used on him in San Gregorio. Blackie's

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A PRISON straitjacket is an instrument of most finished torture.

For the first few minutes, oppressed breathing is the only inconvenience felt. Then the stagnating blood commences to cause pains as if white-hot needles are being passed through the flesh. Irresistible weights seem to be crushing the brain.

Four hours in the jacket made one convict a paralytic for life. Some men have endured it for three quarters of an hour without crying out, but only a few.

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A quarter of an hour later ten pained, racked prisoners were welcomed back to the mill. With them came the deputy warden's acceptance of Boston Blackie's terms. In the midst of the turbulent jollification a half-witted, one-armed boy, nicknamed "The Squirrel," drew out his mouth-organ and tried to express his joy in the one way he knew.

"Cut out the bum music!" cried a burly convict. "Where d'you finger in this, you nutty Squirrel?"

The boy's eyes filled with tears and his notes faltered.

"Go ahead. Play, little Squirrel," Boston Blackie said encouragingly.

"Good-bye, dear one," he said. "I've got one of us, you know, and we're all happy."

That night Boston Blackie lay on his cell bunk, anxiously probing the future. In his mind he still saw the broken bits of Martin Sherwood's brook straw fluttering to the mill floor.

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MARY DAWSON never missed a visiting day at the San Gregorio penitentiary.

On a bright Saturday afternoon Blackie hurried through the gates to the reception room, pass in hand. Mary sprang to his side, hands outstretched. Their kiss was interrupted by the gruff voice of Ellis, the reception room guard.

"Wait a minute there, Blackie," he commanded. "Who is this woman?"

"Who is she?" repeated the convict in amazement. "Why, she is my wife."

"I know she has managed to slip in here on visiting days," Ellis said, "but we're told she's an ex-convict herself. If so, she can't visit you. The rules don't permit it."

The man turned to Mary.



BOSTON BLACKIE STRAIGHTENED HIS SHOULDERS AND HELD OUT HIS WRISTS FOR THE HANDCUFFS. "COME, COME," HE URGED. "TAKE ME AWAY."

"Isn't this your picture?" he asked sneeringly.

Years before Mary Dawson, daughter of Dayton Tom, a professional crook, had been sent to the penitentiary rather than clear herself at the expense of one of her father's pals.

"It's my photograph," she said in a choked voice. "But, Mr. Ellis, I wasn't guilty. Don't take our visits away from us. They're—they're all we have."

"That's what they all say," the guard answered. "You're lucky the deputy don't put the city dicks (detectives) on to you."

"Did the deputy tell you to bar Mary from visiting me?" Blackie demanded of the guard.

"What's that to you?" the man answered. "She's barred, that's all. She's got to come here any way among decent women, the—"

Boston Blackie's blow caught him on the chin and Ellis toppled to the floor. In a second Blackie was upon him, grasping his throat in a frenzy of rage.

Women screamed, convicts shouted encouragement. Mary's voice, pleading, restored the convict to sanity. Blackie's grip loosened. He took Mary in his arms.

"Good-bye, dear one," he said. "I've tried to get by here without trouble, but Sherwood won't let me. Watch and wait for me—some day I'll come."

Guards rushed in and one struck Blackie over the head with a club. Unconscious, he was carried to the deputy's office.

"Take him to punishment hall and leave him there for tonight. Don't give him punishment—I'll attend to that in the mornings," the deputy ordered.

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Blackie's plan for escape required that he sleep in the hospital dormitory used for tuberculosis patients and others unfit for the cell-houses but not bedridden. To accomplish this he diluted prison laundry soap, strong with lye, and drank it day after day until it ruined his stomach.

Blackie had been in the hospital dormitory two months. He wasn't ready to make his bid for freedom, but must make the attempt that night or never.

He took a spade and laboriously began to dig around the rose bushes that flanked the lawn. No one saw him uncover a rude saw made with his hoe file from a steel knife from the kitchen. The saw and a tobacco sack containing a single five-dollar bill were hidden in his blouse. The bill had come from Mary.

Next he asked permission to air his blankets on the clothesline in the lower yard. The toolhouse in which

his garden implements were kept was near by. From beneath its floor he took a civilian pair of trousers, a blue shirt and a mackinaw coat and a cap. It had taken him one full month to steal them from the tailor shop where the clothes of the new arrivals were kept after they received the prison stripes. The trousers Blackie put on under his striped ones, pinning up the legs well out of sight. When his blankets went to his cell, the coat, shirt and cap were hidden in them.

A half hour before lock-up time Blackie rolled up his garden hose and carried it to the toolhouse. Once within its doors and alone, he cut off six feet of the hose and wound it around his body, tying it in place. Next from a pile of rubbish he unearthed a single rubber glove. Two hundred feet of heavy twine from the mill completed the list of preparations.

At 5 o'clock Boston Blackie and the other hospital inmates were locked in their cells for the night. At five minutes past 5 the Squirrel began to play on his mouth-organ.

Blackie chipped away the soap and lamplack with which he had plugged a half-sawn window bar and cut at it in frantic haste.

A mirror hung on the wall near the door warned Blackie of the approach of the guard each time he made his rounds. Hour after hour the Squirrel played, and hour after hour Blackie sawed.

The saw blade cut into his hands and tore his finger tips. Often it seemed as if he couldn't drive his tortured muscles another second.

Sheer will power kept the saw moving.

At last it was done. The prison bell tolled out nine. The lights winked out and silence settled over the dormitory.

At 1 o'clock Blackie waited for the guard to pass, then slipped out of his convict clothes and fashioned them into dummy, which he covered with blankets to resemble a sleeping man.

He dressed in his civilian clothes with his six-foot length of hose still coiled about his body. He tucked his one glove carefully into his breast beside the ball of twine, and hung the shoes about his neck. Then he pulled out one of the heavy legs of his stool and tied it across his back. He took another stool leg, and using it as a lever, bent the sawed bars straight out. A moment later he stood outside on the window ledge.

Below him the wall fell away sheer for four stories. Six feet above his head the rain gutter marked the level of the flat roof. With fingers and toes clutching the bricks that jutted out a few inches around the window coping he climbed upward.

At last his fingers clutched the edge of the roof gutter. He swung his feet clear and raised himself to the roof by his arms.

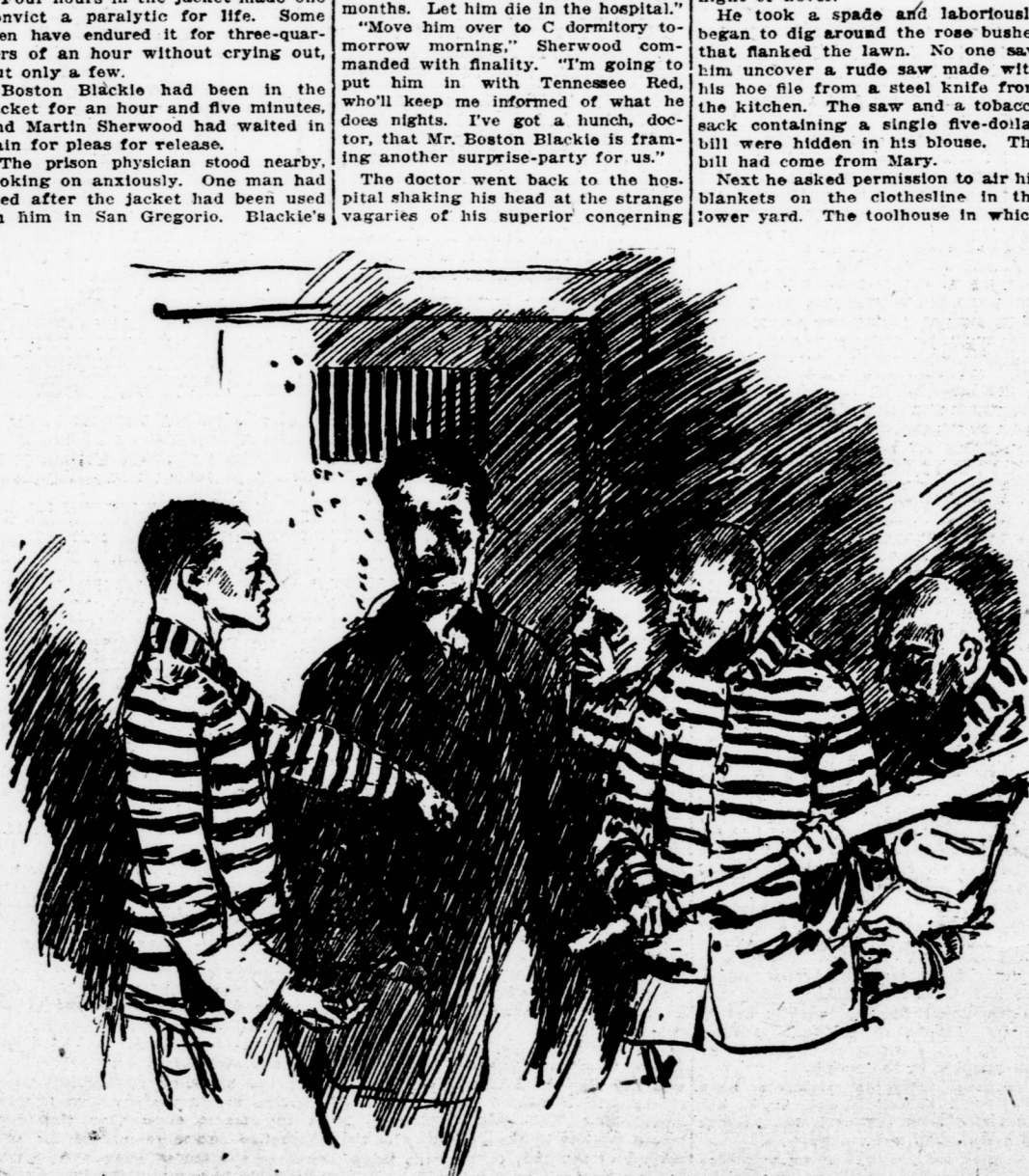
Blackie crept silently to the edge of the roof, nearest the wall, from which he was separated by a full hundred feet of space. Two glistening copper wires ran down from the roof at a sharp angle to a pole outside the wall above which they hung a full twenty feet. They were uninsulated, live wires which fed the prison machinery and lighting system with a current that was death to whatever touched them.

Blackie unwound the length of rubber hose from about his body. He laid the insulating rubber over the strands of shining metal. He bound and rebound the stool leg to the hanging ends of rubber that hung beneath them.

Then he pulled out his ball of jute twine and attached it to a brick chimney; then seated himself on the bar of his improvised trapeze. With his back toward the wall, he swung clear of the roof and began his slide down the wires, regulating his speed with the cord on the chimney.

The wires swayed and sagged but supported his weight. Yard by yard he let himself down. Suddenly the chimney corner snapped. The hose trapeze shot downward.

With the hand covered with his rubber glove Blackie caught one of the wires and checked his fall. Slowly he slid over the wall and down toward the pole. When its shadow warned him he had almost reached it, he slipped from his seat on the trapeze and dropped.



"GO," BLACKIE SAID. "GET OUT BEFORE THEY KILL YOU."

SHROUDED in the early morning fog, a gaunt wraith of a man climbed a rear stairway to a tiny apartment on Laguna street, San Francisco, and softly rapped at the bedroom window.

The woman within, in awe, sprang to the sash and threw it open, seizing in her arms the scarecrow of a man who stood there and dragging him inside.

"Blackie!" she answered.

All the endearments of all the languages of the world were in the two words.

"We must get away from here at once," Blackie said. "True, deputy warden's no ordinary copper. But, little sweetheart, I'll promise you this: Whether he finds us or not, he'll never take Boston Blackie back to San Gregorio. Have you my gun?"

Mary nodded, shuddering.

They crossed to the other side of the city and rented a room on the edge of a good residence district.

"Mary," said Blackie the moment they were alone, "I have a safe here until tonight, but no longer. Go down—own a Levy's harical costume shop. Tell them you're playing a grandmother's part in an amateur play and get a complete old woman's outfit—white wig, clothes, shoes, everything. Get a cheap hat and a working-girl's hand-me-down, too. Draw every dollar we have in the bank. You better bring something to eat, too—just a loaf of bread, for I ruined my stomach with lye and I can't eat anything but crusts."

He drew two revolvers from their sash, looked carefully at their loads and laid them on the bed.

"I'm going to sleep while you're gone. I didn't get much rest last night," he said, smiling happily.

At noon that day the police located Mary Dawson's Laguna street apartment.

The chief called in a dozen of his best men, armed them and sent them out in two autos.

"Take no chances with him, boys," the chief warned. "He's a bad one. Take care of yourselves."

When everything was ready the captain in charge of the expedition set the hands of the clock back a phony letter, with four bawny men ready to seize whoever opened it. There was no response to repeated knocks. Finally the landlady took a pass key and opened the door.

"Go!" the captain barked.

On the third day a detective brought in the information that a landlady identified Blackie's picture as that of a man who came with his wife and rented a room on the morning of the escape. There had two such cases. The police frankly were gone.

"I thought so," Sherwood mused. "Boston Blackie won't stir from his place of refuge for weeks, maybe months."

Sherwood turned the management of the prison over to a subordinate. The police frankly were gone. Only Sherwood kept at the task.

"The doctor said that illness was real," he pondered. Blackie hadn't eaten anything but crusts of bread for weeks. He left the inside of a loaf in his cell. All the inside of a loaf.

Martin Sherwood sprang to his feet. "It's a long chance," he said to himself. "But it is a chance."

THE deputy warden drove out to the city incinerator and explained to the superintendent.

"I'll pay the man who finds the crutest inside of a loaf of bread in a garbage can \$100 for the address from which that can was filled."

"In three days, Mary, just three short days, we'll sail out through the Golden Gate. You and I will be together with our mother and father."

Mary clung to him as he spoke. In three days the Colon sailed for Central American ports. Their passage was paid. Once aboard the steamer and out of the harbor, they would be safe and free and unafraid.

But just before their low-voiced Martin Sherwood questioned their landlady.

"I have no roomers but a Miss Collins and her mother, who is an invalid, poor soul. They have the two rooms in the attic," she was telling the deputy. "The girl is learning to cook."

The old lady is crippled with rheumatism and can't leave the rooms. Oh, they are nice, quiet, respectable people, sir."

"What does the girl look like?" What is the color of her hair?" Sherwood asked.

"Red, sir—a beautiful red."

Mary's hair was coal black. Martin Sherwood was puzzled.

"When did they come here?" he asked.

"Why, let me see: It was a week ago Thursday, sir, in the evening. They came just before I went to work—which is 9 o'clock, sir."

"I would like to go up and see them for a moment," Sherwood told the woman. "I'm an officer." He showed his star.

"Oh, no, nothing wrong at all. I just want to see them. If I could keep track of people in the district."

"Certainly, sir. I'll call Miss Collins and—"

"No, no—that isn't necessary," interrupted Sherwood. "I'll just step upstairs and knock."

Though he tried to step lightly, there was a sudden shuffle of feet on the floor above. He rapped.

A few seconds of silence. Then came the sound of a woman sobbing hysterically. Sherwood knocked again peremptorily.

The door was flung wide open and a woman faced him—a woman with a wealth of bronze hair that should have been black but whom he instantly recognized as Boston Blackie's Mary.

Martin Sherwood sprang inside with drawn revolver, ready to answer the stream of lead he expected from some corner of the room. None came. Instead he saw a woman white-haired and feeble, sitting beside a bed with bowed head, while her body shook with convulsive sobs. On the bed, covered with a sheet drawn up over her face, lay a silent, motionless form.

Sudden disappointment gripped Martin Sherwood's heart.

"Where's Boston Blackie?" he demanded, his gun covering the room. Mary pointed silently to the still figure on the bed.

"Dead?" exclaimed the deputy warden. "When? How?"

"An hour ago," she sobbed. "You starved him to death in your prison."

Sherwood strode to the bed, and, leaning over, lifted the sheet. Beneath the sheet he saw a roll of blankets molded and tied into the semblance of a human form. Before he could turn, cold steel was pressed against the base of his brain.

"Drop that gun, Sherwood," said Boston Blackie's voice from behind him. "Drop it quick!"

Sherwood smiled and let his revolver slip through his fingers to the bed. Here was a worthy antagonist.

"Pick up his gun, Mary, and lay it on the table, well out of the deputy's reach," directed Blackie. "Then see if he has another. Now," he continued, "slip off these skirts."